

China's Central Asian Reach – The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the China Russia Bi-Lateral Relationship

Prepared Statement of Christopher Brown from The Program on Transitions
to Democracy, Hudson Institute

Hearing on Tuesday, December 14, 2005, at 2:00 p.m.

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, House
International Relations Committee

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Distinguished Chairman Rohrabacher; Members of the Committee; Fellow
Panelist; Guests

It is an honor and a pleasure to be here today to discuss these most important of issues that will have an enormous impact on the future vital security and interests of the United States of America. I wish to note with a bit of historical irony that the day after this hearing was originally scheduled to be held was the sixty-fourth anniversary of the surprise attack by the imperial Japanese force on Pearl Harbor.

Much like the rise of imperial Japan that preceded this unprecedented attack on America; the rise of Communist China is comparable as both of these régimes were examples of rapidly growing economic and military powers without the accompanying social developments needed to curb the associated and dangerous expanding appetites and passions of an emerging power.

Unfortunately, there is one very important and significant difference between the rise of these two powers. Whereas Japan pursued its expansionistic militarism without the any real direct aid of allies, China has been very busy in a coordinated effort to develop and expand an international foundation on which its expansion will be based. This is being done for a multitude of reasons ranging from access to resources and political clout to potentially more worrisome and even offensive reasons. However I have been asked to limit my remarks to those events in Central Asia in particular those which I researched for Dr. Menges in the preparation of his final book “China the Gathering Threat”, which despite its title is as much about the role that the Russian régime under Putin plays in the rise and expansion of China as about China itself.

In the months prior to the September 11th attack two key treaties were signed between the governments of China and Russia. These agreements received little notice at the time and have since been lost to the tides of history for most observers. However, the long-term implications of these documents have yet to be fully realized.

China has been expanding its ties with nations such as Russia and has created an organization that could in the near future have a geographical reach from the Pacific to the Mediterranean. This organization, which was first examined within a larger Chinese strategy by Dr. Menges book “China the Gathering threat”, which I had the honor of working on for two years, is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or the SCO.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization –

The first of these treaties that I have mention was signed in June 2001 and created the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. This organization, which is headquartered in Beijing, and its original membership was composed of China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Two years ago, they added Mongolia as an observer and invited Afghanistan to their annual meeting of Heads of State. Perhaps even more interestingly, is that in the past year they have added India, Pakistan and most worrisome of all Iran as observer states. This list in just the past few weeks was further expanded when Belarus officially applied for observer, which is Russia has said will be granted in the coming months.¹ This organization also has a regional operations center in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. This is the headquarters of what they term their Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure which goes by the acronym RATS. That is the acronym of their choosing but might I say that I find it to be a mix of both potential irony and truth.

One of the key areas that I and Dr. Menges examined of the early days of the SCO's emergence on the world stage was how they sought to redefine themselves in a post 9-11 world. With the major focus of American and world attention on the fight against the sources of terrorism, the SCO found a way to both expand their military and security relations while placating any potential concerns by place the goals of the SCO under the Chinese inspired rubric of fighting the three evils of separatism, extremism and terrorism.² Although the last two have a ring of common shared goals with America the devil is in the details. In particular, the question is what the nations of the SCO define as extremism or terrorism. For example, the communist government of Beijing views the very existence of a free and democratic system in Taiwan as an example of all three evils.

Early last year the democratic revolution in Kyrgyzstan, which has resulted in a marked increase in freedom for the people of that land was labeled by some observers within the SCO as being a form of extremism. If America is serious about encouraging and furthering the spread of freedom

within Central Asia and wherever else the SCO expands next, we are likely to find ourselves in confrontation with the SCO.

There is also the risk that bad actors might use our own commitment to freedom in a way that works against our interests.³ In fact the use by what have since been revealed to be predominately Islamic extremists in Uzbekistan, who played on western ignorance of that nation, used the adulation surrounding such promising events as the November 2003 "Rose Revolution" in Georgia, the "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine in December 2004, and the "Tulip Revolution" in Kyrgyzstan in February-March 2005 as a means of gaining western sympathies which the Uzbek régime under the control of Islam Karimov saw as a potential threat to his control.⁴ While western nations, demanded negotiations and investigations the Chinese under the cover of the SCO offered unquestioned support for the Karimov directed crackdown. This combined with direct bi-lateral Chinese economic aid and diplomatic pressure culminating in a demand by the SCO on July 5th at the annual meeting of the leaders of the member states, for a timeline for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from SCO member nations.⁵ That same day the United States Department of State responded by saying "our presence [in the SCO member states] . . . is determined by the terms of our bilateral agreements"⁶ -- in effect, ignoring the significance of the SCO and the joint statement signed by Mr. Karimov himself. Within 24 hours, the Uzbekistan foreign ministry reiterated that it was seriously reconsidering the presence of United States forces on Uzbek soil, and less than a month later we were given official notice that Uzbekistan was terminating our basing rights.⁷ In effect we were successfully out maneuvered by the Chinese and now Uzbekistan, which was originally viewed as one of the more hesitant members of the SCO is solidly on the side of China.⁸

Returning to the issue of the so called "color revolutions" which have been wonderful examples of the very power Dr. Menges spent his professional life trying to encourage and which plays a big role in the suggested counter-strategy America should pursue within his book. These internal movements of people seeking freedom and representative government, which demonstrate the true power of even the idea of freedom, have not escaped the attention of either the Chinese or SCO leadership. Just weeks ago at a press conference in Beijing the Executive Secretary of the SCO Zhang Deguang announced that "The time for 'color revolutions' in the Central Asian region has gone...[that it] went away with last year's snow."⁹ He went on to label these peaceful outpouring on the part of the people of these nations seeking freedom to be unacceptable, useless and harmful "interventions into the region's domestic affairs."¹⁰ It should come as no surprise that someone trained and loyal to a régime based on the oppressing over 20% of the worlds

population should label such peaceful, positive and important expansions of freedom and human liberty as unacceptable, useless and harmful.

It is important to note that within the SCO structure that the most senior officials, equal to a cabinet level in our own government, of the every department of the respective member states meet at least once a year for the purpose of increased cooperation and integration of their various portfolios. In effect at least once every month there is a meeting going on within the SCO of cabinet level officials. Although some in the west may dismiss these as insignificant, when one considers the potential consequences of something as simple as the integration of their transportation networks. Consider these discussion in light of such issues in Central Asia ranging from smuggling narcotics and people to the possibility by either states or groups, interested in the proliferation of ballistic missile and weapons of mass destruction using this integration to ease the movement of these materials. With these issues in mind even a simple discussion on the integration of road networks takes on a much larger strategic significance. Especially when one considers that China, Russia, Iran, and Pakistan are all either members or observers of this organization. This is why I have on multiple occasions labeled the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as the most dangerous organization that Americans have never heard of. It is also why Dr. Menges viewed this development with such trepidation.

The China Russia Partnership –

The Second treaty of significance that I and Dr. Menges examined was the bi-lateral treaty between Russia and China. This was signed the month after the SCO charter in July 2001.¹¹ If one were to just go by the title of this treaty, which is the “Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation,” than nothing would seem too worrisome about this development. After all why should anyone object to a treaty which on its face seems designed to sooth relations between to large nuclear armed nations. However once one examines both the actual wording of the treaty and recent events one begins to see the dangerous implications of the growing Sino-Russian relationship that is the centerpiece of the work I did with Dr. Menges. For example Article nine of the treaty states “When a situation arises in which one of the contracting parties deems that peace is being threatened and undermined or its security interests are involved or when it is confronted with the threat of aggression, the contracting parties shall immediately hold contacts and consultations in order to eliminate such threats.”¹² This language which is comparable to Article 5 of the NATO treaty has potentially broad reaching consequences, and is almost friendly when compared to similar wording in the now defunct “Warsaw Pact” that gave free nations nightmares for almost fifty years.

Although China and Russia have over the years provided assurances to the world and more to the point, the United States, that this is a treaty between China and Russia and is not directed outwardly, the truth was revealed late last year when these two nations held the first of what is going to be an annual war-game exercise. Many observers noted that this exercise, which was originally billed as a counter-terrorism operation, had a strikingly amphibious/airborne invasion characteristic to it that most obviously pointed to a potential operation against Taiwan as opposed to an operation aimed at any potential terrorists that either China or Russia may face.¹³

Even as this unprecedented exercise was ending, there were already announcements that there would be another large-scale joint war game between China and Russia in 2006.¹⁴ Interestingly China and Russia under the context of this massive operation invoked the need to combat the “three evils” of the SCO as the reason and the justification for this operation which was held under the authority of their supposedly non-military treaty of “Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation.” In addition to the 2006 bi-lateral exercises that are being planned between Russia and China there are multiple exercises that are already being scheduled for 2006 and 2007 within the SCO.¹⁵ It should be also be noted that Yury Baluyevsky Chief of Russia's General Staff said just last November that the 2007 China Russia Bi-lateral war games will be held under the SCO framework as opposed to the Bi-lateral treaty.¹⁶ This announcement coincided with a renewed Chinese effort to once again sought to assure the world that the SCO is not really a military organization.¹⁷

Conclusion –

In conclusion, the increasing cooperation on military issues between Russia and China both bi-laterally and within the Chinese controlled SCO, which of course includes the sale of advanced Russian military equipment such as the “Aegis/Carrier Killer” Sunburn anti-ship cruise missile, has allowed China to advance their military and force projection capabilities considerably in the recent years. This is further illustrated in a number of charts that were prepared for the book but left out in the final version that I have submitted to be included in the written record for the committees benefit. This is of great concern given that as is pointed out in the book “China the Gathering Threat” that China has repeatedly called all American security relationship in the Asia Pacific region illegitimate and violations of Chinese national sovereignty.¹⁸ This military strength in turn is both a symptom and a cause behind Beijing’s increasingly assertive political and economic actions which comes at the expense of American and her allies

around the world as well as the freedom loving people within the spheres of this expansion.

Now although many may scoff at what they might term the rhetoric of the Chinese government, and even label it ridiculous in light of the obvious qualitative advantages of the modern American and allied militaries currently enjoy, such a dismissive attitude ignores the fundamental truth of international relations. That truth is that although perceptions may differ from the objective nature of the world, those perceptions of the actors in fact create the reality through which individuals and nations act regardless of what the truth may be. Therefore it is important that we learn the lessons of history; and be proactive in our approach to China heeding the words of Winston Churchill in his famous “Iron Curtain” speech where he said of World War 2 “There never was a war in all history easier to prevent by timely action . . . but no one would listen. . . . We surely must not let that happen again.”¹⁹

Chinese ambition and overconfidence and our own dismissive attitude of these gathering storm clouds and the real path that China is pursuing, as opposed to the path that we hope they will take, could easily spiral out of control very rapidly into a war of mutual miscalculation between America and China. That is at the heart of the warning that Dr. Menges and I worked on in preparing “China the Gathering Threat”.²⁰

I am now pleased to answer any of questions from the committee.

¹ “Belarus May Join SCO Any Time – Putin” Itar-Tass December 16, 2005

² “China: Spokesman on plan for anti-terrorism centre against ‘3 evil forces’” Ta Kung Pao June 15, 2001

³ Mark N. Katz “Revolution in Central Asia?” United Press International January 14, 2006

⁴ Sarah Shenker “Struggle for influence in Central Asia” BBC News November 27, 2005

⁵ “Declaration of Heads of Member States of Shanghai Cooperation Organization” July 5, 2005 (Unofficial SCO English Translation available at http://www.sectSCO.org/news_detail.asp?id=500&LanguageID=2)

⁶ “China, Russia-led alliance wants date for U.S pullout” Associated Press July 5, 2005

⁷ Christopher Brown “Uzbekistan signals” The Washington Times August 14, 2005

⁸ Simon Tisdall “Uzbekistan looks east for new friends” The Guardian November 24, 2005

⁹ “SCO Executive Secretary Says Time For 'Color Revolutions' in Central Asia Gone” Interfax January 16, 2006

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ “Russia and China sign friendship pact” BBC News July 16, 2001

¹² “Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation Between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation” July 24, 2005 English version available on the Chinese Foreign Ministry Website at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt/2649/t15771.htm>

¹³ Fred Weir “Russia and China meld muscle for war games Shared concerns of regional unrest push aside differences” The Christian Science Monitor August 17, 2005

¹⁴ “Russia plans another joint military exercise with China in 2006” RIA Novosti August 26, 2005

¹⁵ “Shanghai organization to hold military exercises in 2006-2007” RIA Novosti September 25, 2005

¹⁶ “Russian-Chinese 2007 exercises to be held under SCO” RIA Novosti December 1, 2005

¹⁷ “Chief Zhang Says SCO Will 'Absolutely Never Become Euro-Asian Military Alliance” Xinhua January 17, 2006

¹⁸ Constantine Menges “China the Gathering Threat” Nelson Current April 19, 2005 Pg. 294

¹⁹ Winston Churchill “Sinews of Peace” Westminster College Fulton Missouri March 5, 1946

²⁰ Menges Op. Cit pg. 511